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# Sounds and Phonemes

- 1.How would you define a phoneme?
- 2.What's a vowel?
- 3.What's a consonant?

# Phoneme, Vowel & Consonant

Phonemes are the smallest unit of sound in a language and can be divided into vowels and consonants.

For you to think about vowels and consonants:

What's the difference between 'bit', 'beat', 'bait'?

How about the underlined phonemes in plosive, lateral and fricative?

**Vowels** are voiced sounds, produced by changing the position of the tongue in ways which do not generally involve touching the palate. The sound is formed by the air passing through the mouth in a continual stream without obstruction or audible friction.

Both **length** and **quality** help to distinguish vowel sounds in English.

- ✓ Seven short vowel sounds: /ɪ/ (bit); /e/ (pen); /æ/ (hat); /ə/ (ago); /ʌ/ (cut); /ɒ/ (dot); /ʊ/ (put)
- ✓ Five long vowel sounds: /i:/ (beat); /ɜ/ (bird); /ɑ/ (father); /ɔ:/ (lord); /u:/ (soon)
- ✓ **Diphthongs**: phonemes formed of two monothong sounds (like two vowel sounds) joining together in a glide. Ex.: /aɪ/ (dive); /ɔɪ/ (coin); /eə/ (hair); /aʊ/ (now).

It has a similar length to a long vowel and is produced as if it were one sound only, starting in one part of the mouth and moving smoothly to another:

- ✓ Closing: /eɪ/ (pain); /aɪ/ (tie); /ɔɪ/; /əʊ/ (home); /aʊ/ (town)
- ✓ Centring: /ɪə/ (here); /eə/ (there); /eə/ (tour)

**Consonants** are speech sounds where the airstream from the lung is either completely blocked (**Stop/ Plosive**, ex. /t/, /p/), partially blocked (**Lateral Approximant**, ex. /l/) or whether the opening is so narrow that the air escapes with audible friction (**Fricative**, ex. /f/).

They are generally identified according to:

1. the **place** where they are formed (point of obstruction);
2. the **manner** they are formed (e.g. Explosive release of air);
3. whether or not they call for the **vibration** of the vocal cords.

# The Phonemic Chart

ɪ	I	ʊ	u:	Iə	eɪ	ɪ:	X
e	ə	ɜ:	ɔ:	ʊə	ɔɪ	əʊ	
æ	ʌ	ɑ:	ɒ	eə	aɪ	aʊ	
p	b	t	d	ts	dʒ	k	g
f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j

